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Organization of African Unity

**INAUGURAL STATEMENT**

**BY**

**H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,  
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION  
OF AFRICAN UNITY AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCHING  
OF THE AFRICAN WOMEN COMMITTEE ON PEACE  
AND DEVELOPMENT**

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**11 November, 1998**

- **Madam Chairperson,**
- **Ato Dawit Yohannes,  
Speaker of the House,**
- **Mr. K.Y. Amoako,  
Under Secretary General of the United  
Nations and Executive Secretary of the ECA,**
- **Honourable Ministers,**
- **Distinguished Members of the African  
Women's Committee on Peace and  
Development,**
- **Excellencies,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

I wish to extend to you all a very warm welcome to this most auspicious gathering marking the official inauguration of the African Women's Committee on Peace and Development.

I am particularly pleased to acknowledge the presence within this august gathering, of the distinguished personalities and activists who have been working tirelessly to ensure that African Women assume their rightful places in efforts to bring peace, stability and development in our Continent. I salute them for their courage, commitment and dedication to

the cause of the upliftment of African Women and welcome them to this historic occasion. I wish also to express our appreciation to the Speaker of the House and Ethiopian Ministers here present. Their presence clearly demonstrates Ethiopia's support for the Committee and its objectives.

This session marks the culmination of their efforts and those of the many other women across the Continent who have been working, often anonymously but with great determination towards the enhancement of the role of women in our continent. I have been privileged for having been associated with their struggle. Indeed, over the last years, I, as Secretary General of our continental Organization, have been keen in extending the maximum support of the OAU to the various initiatives undertaken by African Women. Thanks to their commitment and determination, the cause of African Women has seen significant progress recently.

As we meet here today, we therefore celebrate the role of women on our societies and we should re-dedicate ourselves to the promotion of their contribution to the political, social, cultural and economic endeavours within our countries. I wish to seize this opportunity to state clearly that it is in the interest of society that the role of women is promoted and enhanced, and that the cause of women should not be the concern of women alone. It is the concern of all of us: men, women and youth.

There is no doubt that women, who are already paying the heaviest price of peace and development of our Continent can make an immense contribution towards the political and socio-economic emancipation of our Continent, if propitious conditions are created in our countries. It is in this context of creating an enabling environment for the promotion of the role of Women in our Continent that we should situate today's occasion.

At a time when our Continent is beset with the scourge of conflicts, we cannot afford to continue to ignore and neglect the contribution that African Women can make towards achieving peace, security and stability. More than any other social group, Women have a higher stake in preventing and resolving conflicts, and in promoting peace. Invariably, on situations of conflicts, it is the women who are the unsung heroines, carrying the burden of caring, not only for families, but for whole communities. They bear the brunt of the onslaught, but continue to be the stabilizing factor and inspiration for their peoples. Quite often, too, both during and after conflicts, women are also the ones who have to pick up the pieces in order to preserve and recover society's cultural heritages.

Over the last years, we, at the OAU, had the opportunity of supporting peace initiatives by concerned African Women. We have sponsored Women's Group to Liberia, which helped in the election process in that country, which, as you all know was confronted to seven years long

conflict with its attendant suffering, violence, trauma and destruction. We also sponsored an Eminent Women's Group which involved some of those who are present here today, to visit Burundi and to contribute to the peace process in that country.

More recently, we sponsored the initiative led by the Vice President of Uganda, bringing together a group of women who quietly, amidst the turmoil and trauma of the conflict in Burundi, had been working at the grassroots level to build bridges between the various groups in Burundi.

With the establishment of the Women's Committee on Peace and Development, we, at the OAU, shall clearly embark on a closer and more systematic collaboration with Women in our peace endeavours within the framework of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. In this respect, we shall do our utmost to involve Women in peace efforts, particularly at the preventive level since, as you are aware, the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution places special emphasis on the anticipation and prevention of conflicts.

Besides, our endeavour to promote peace in the Continent, there is the other challenge of socio-economic of the Continent and its integration. Here also, women are expected to make their vital contribution that goes

beyond the role they are presently playing within African economies. Indeed, the building of the African Economic Community and the Regional Economic Communities requires a strong partnership between Governments and the peoples at all levels. The establishment of the African Economic Community was conceived by the African Leaders, who signed the Abuja Treaty in 1991 as the most viable framework for socio-economic development in an international economic environment where the actors are increasingly groups of nations and other entities and no more individual countries.

As we have embarked on the implementation process of the Abuja Treaty in close cooperation with Regional Economic Communities, and of course, with our partners, the ECA and the ADB, we shall make it a point to associate the Women's Committee on Peace and Development in our joint efforts. In this respect, I shall be working closely with Mr. Amoako, the Executive Secretary of the ECA with whom I share similar commitment towards the betterment of the socio-economic conditions of our Continent.

We shall, at the same time, rely on this Committee to play a catalytic role in mobilizing support at grassroots and leadership levels for the implementation of our Continent's agenda for peace and development.

Finally, I wish to thank the members of the Committee for accepting to serve the cause of peace and development in our Continent. I would like to assure you all that just as the OAU worked to ensure the setting up of the Committee, you will not find us wanting in ensuring its support. We, at the OAU, shall endeavour to make our utmost to make this Committee as effective as possible, and to make use of its services. Let us therefore commit ourselves to work together, hand in hand, in improving the conditions of our Continent and its peoples and in changing its image into a better one.

I wish the Committee full success in its mission.